

State Senator

Chuck Purgason

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Capitol Report

Important Legislation from the 2005 Session

School Funding

This legislation funds schools more equitably and guarantees Missouri schools will have the funding to provide our students with an adequate education. Over the next several years, annual education funding will increase by more than \$800 million.

Our previous system allocated funds according to property values and taxes in Missouri's 524 school districts. Because of the difference in property values, wealthier districts had more to spend than did poorer ones.

Missouri's new formula, however, accounts for these differences and funds our schools on the basis of student need.

This new system determines an adequate funding figure for each district and ensures that districts have enough to spend on students. Also, \$15 million has been set aside for smaller districts.

This legislation will bring Missouri schools into the 21st century and will ensure that our children receive the education they need and deserve.



Sen. Purgason speaks on the Missouri Senate floor.

and businesses. The bill lowers caps on jury awards for non-economic damages and reforms the "joint and several liability" provision, which can require some defendants to pay more than their share of liability.

The legislation also prevents "venue shopping," a process in which trials are moved to jurisdictions that give the highest awards. These reforms will create a system that is fair for Missouri businesses and doctors.

Workers' Compensation

My colleagues and I also worked to eliminate corruption in workers' compensation claims for the sake of Missouri businesses by reducing awards to workers who are injured while violating workplace safety standards.

This legislation also places the burden of proof on employees, which will further reduce illegitimate claims.

Tort Reform

Another vital bill signed into law makes needed changes to Missouri's civil liability system, in turn creating a fairer environment for state doctors



Medicaid was created in the late 1960s to provide state-funded health care to those who are truly in need. Missouri's spending on the Medicaid program has grown from \$38,914,458 (4 percent of our state budget) in 1968 to \$4,888,399,124 (28 percent) in 2004.

Just because Missouri's Medicaid rolls have grown does not mean our program is more compassionate. True compassion means providing the less fortunate with quality health care, not government handouts to self-sufficient individuals.

Medicaid has swelled beyond its means over the past two gubernatorial administrations, so this year legislators were faced with the task of devising a more fiscally responsible plan.

The budget was written according to Missouri's priorities, and because adequately funding public schools is the state's main goal, lawmakers had no choice but to tighten excessive spending on social programs.

The 2005 reforms include stricter eligibility verification and oversight to keep Medicaid from collapsing on itself. No qualified child or pregnant woman will be cut off Medicaid, and the state will continue to provide prosthetics, eyeglasses, podiatry and dental services for most adults, subject to appropriations.

The legislative plan restores income eligibility thresholds to the level they were at just three years ago and closes a loophole that allowed some wealthy individuals to qualify for Medicaid benefits.

Missouri is on its way to improving the state-funded health-care system so that the brunt of budget cuts is not placed on the backs of those who need help the most.

Making Progress in the War on Meth

In the 2005 legislative session, my colleagues and I made further advances in the fight against methamphetamine. Meth producers now face major hurdles in obtaining key ingredients to cook the drug. The new law requires that some over-the-counter cold medicines containing pseudo-ephedrine, such as Sudafed, only be purchased from pharmacists or registered technicians.

All purchases are now logged in a database available for police inspection. The legislation

primarily addresses pseudo-ephedrine-based products in the dry-tablet form because they are easier to grind and are typically used in the meth-cooking process. Gel capsules and syrup elixir do not easily lend themselves to the production of meth.

States that have enacted similar laws, such as Oklahoma, have witnessed a dramatic decrease in meth labs. Some reports have stated that Oklahoma's law, the first to restrict access to pseudoephedrine

products, has reduced meth production in that state by 80 percent in less than one year. Meanwhile, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas and Texas have also passed similar legislation.

Less meth means fewer people becoming addicted to this drug and causing less harm to themselves, their families and their neighbors. By limiting meth manufacturers' access to these chemicals, we can work to counter an affliction that has crippled communities throughout Missouri.

The 2005 Special Session

The 2005 special and veto sessions came to a close Sept. 15. After just two weeks, the General Assembly passed important pro-life legislation and saved Missouri's workers' compensation system.

Lawmakers approved legislation I co-sponsored allowing lawsuits to be filed against people who help minors cross the state line to receive abortions. The measure enforces Missouri law requiring anyone under age 18 to receive parental approval before getting an abortion.

The legislation also requires abortion clinics to have privileges to provide obstetric and gynecological care at hospitals within 30 miles of the clinic. These provisions will work together to protect our children – born and unborn.

A drafting error in a workers' compensation bill was also corrected during special session. The error would have detrimentally affected the workers' compensation system itself. However, the measure was fixed, ensuring that Missouri workers will have proper coverage.

Lawmakers also approved a resolution declaring opposition to a planned "spring rise" of the Missouri

River. The federal government has proposed releasing more water during springtime to increase reproduction among birds and fish. However, downstream farmers have opposed the plan because of

the increased risk of flooding. Commercial carriers and hydroelectric plants are also concerned because the spring rise will result in low water levels in following seasons, which will threaten their production.

Several other measures were also addressed. Bills affecting the posting of public officials' addresses and phone numbers online, creating new crimes for adults who allow minors to drink on their

property, and prohibiting the distribution of prescription drugs on school property have been improved. Conflicting language concerning drunk-driving laws was also resolved.

Lawmakers also completed a veto session that began September 14. The General Assembly chose to let the governor's vetoes stand.

It was a pleasure to serve my constituents once again in Jefferson City.



Sen. Purgason speaks with Sen. Jason Crowell on the floor of the Missouri Senate.

On Time. Balanced. No New Taxes.

Missouri's 2005-2006 Spending Plan

Distribution of Each General Revenue Tax Dollar

FY 2006 After Veto Missouri Operating Appropriations
General Revenue: \$7.159 Billion



Budget Basics

- \$113-million increase for the education foundation formula.
- Full funding of the First Steps program for 8,000 developmentally disabled infants and toddlers.
- Medicaid funding for hospice care, ambulance payments, oxygen and respiratory equipment, wheelchairs, diabetic supplies and prosthetics, subject to appropriations.
- \$13.8 million for the state's veteran's homes.
- \$11.5-million increase for child care for low-income working parents.
- A wage increase for home- and community-based workers who provide services for the elderly and adults with disabilities.

A Note on Sen. Purgason

Sen. Charles (Chuck) Purgason represents the 33rd Senatorial District in the Missouri Senate. He was elected to the Senate in 2004 and served in the Missouri House from 1996 through 2004.

Sen. Purgason was born in West Plains on May 19, 1960, and graduated from West Plains High School in 1978. In addition to his legislative duties, Sen. Purgason is the founder and owner of Ozark Awards and Ozark Wings Hatchery and Hunting Preserve. He also operates a cow/calf operation on the family farm near Caulfield, where he resides with his wife, Janet, and three children, Robert, Tracey and Cory.

Sen. Purgason serves as the vice-chair of the Pensions, Veterans' Affairs and General Laws Committee and is a member of the Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources; Appropriations; and Gubernatorial Appointments committees and the Medicaid Reform Commission.

Sen. Purgason is a member of several area chambers of commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business, among other organizations. He attends the First Baptist Church of West Plains.

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